

Written Delegation to Burlington City Council

New Street Pilot Project: Alternative Analysis

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Key Themes

- You built a disconnected major artery for cycling, and yet ridership went up 25%
- Viewing the data provided through a different lens provides a drastically different outcome from the staff report.
- The City of Burlington should be championing New Street Pilot as a win that fits within its strategic plan.

Key Points

- Report as it stands does not do justice to the impact the bike lanes have had.
- Objectives of the Pilot were clearly met.
- Undue value is being given to a vocal group of commuters who have used engagement channels more effectively (only angry people come to council/submit feedback on Facebook or email)
- Recommendations presented by staff will likely incur a much higher cost than continuing with what is already in place.

Analysis

Successes

- According to the purpose section of this report, the overall objectives of the pilot project were to reduce risk for all road users by providing a dedicated space for cyclist, as well as encourage more people to travel by bicycle.
- According to the data provided, ridership increased on average 25% (60/day to 80/day average), and cyclists, and supporters interviewed in the Community Feedback section said in broad terms that cycling was much safer, pedestrians found it easier to cross, easier left turning on New St., and reduced dangerous lane changes. I'd say that qualifies meeting both of the objectives.
- Further to the Qualitative data collected, the collision analysis showed no discernable change in safety, and a continuing downward trend, and while staff are uncomfortable drawing a conclusion on this, cyclists reporting they felt safer, and the lack of an uptick in collisions would lead me to think that the objective of safer cycling is still being met.
- Even those opposed to the project noted two safety issues, cyclists on sidewalks, and building an off road facility would be better. While riding on sidewalks in Burlington isn't against the law as far as I know, that doesn't mean it is safer. Drivers often aren't looking for someone moving that quickly on a sidewalk, and if you are a cycle commuter on a road style bike, the design of a sidewalk is very difficult to navigate and ride on.

Costs

- While it is fantastic that the pilot project has met its objectives, it has certainly come at a cost to others, such as commuters. Though, in my opinion these have been overstated.

- Examining the Daily traffic volumes on parallel streets, we can see they increased 16% on Woodward, and Decreased 12% on Spruce. It is only noted that the 16% increase is worth considering, even though it is within 75 vehicles difference then same overall number of vehicles as the decrease on Spruce. There are also some other factors that could have driven these changes, but I will come back to that.
- Travel times also increased substantially for one of the four travel times measured, which was the afternoon rush, nearly doubling it. On its own, it seems like quite a large increase, but if we assume a commuter is coming from Union Station and has a 10 minute drive home from the Burlington GO Station, from sitting on the train to arriving at home has increased from 75 minutes to 77 minutes, or a 2% increase to overall commute time.
- The final cost mentioned is the 'taxpayer dollars' that went into this project. Many of the opposition complaints to this are echoed towards many city services (no one is on the bus, no one uses the park, etc.). Some even calling this a waste of taxpayer money. I would submit that reverting this pilot back to its original state and pursuing government funding of a very expensive off road option would be a bigger waste of taxpayer money.

Bias

- Upon reviewing these facts I have stated, which are identical to the ones in the report, I'm not quite sure how staff moved towards a recommendation that the pilot end.
- My sense is that through the some of the selective analysis, and weight given to dissenting views, an element of bias is present. I will provide some examples.
- In section 2.1 the 16% increase on Woodward Avenue is addressed as notable, and given much more focus than the 12% decrease on Spruce. If 16% is notable, so is -12%
- A 25% increase in average cyclists is cast in a negative light in the first line of the summary, "While cycling numbers have increased by 20 per day...it is not apparent that it can be attributed solely to the on-road bike lanes." If this is the logic of the analysis, why can't we say the same about increased commute times, or parallel road displacement? Since the traffic displacement data was collected in June, with a date not specified, and people continuing to take their accustomed detour around the construction at Guelph and New, is it not possible that could account for the volume increases and decreases on parallel roads?
- This 25% increase happened even though the report states that this project was, "Not ideally integrated into a larger east-west cycling facility", safety was not compromised, commute times increased marginally for cars. You built a highway to nowhere, and yet, if you build it, they will come still applies.

Looking to the Future

- Imagine if this facility was built into a proper minimum grid? Cyclists are looking for a corridor of safe, efficient cycle routes that will get them where they need to go. I cannot tell you how frustrating it is to ride from Guelph along Upper Middle to Appleby with having to switch from bike lane, to off road trail, to sidewalk, back to bike lane.

- I'm imploring council to not support the recommendation in this report to remove the pilot, and rather use it as a springboard to design and expand a full network of consistent on road bike lanes for a minimum grid.
- I understand the Burlington Cycling Committee is supporting the movement to develop a much more expensive cycle track, however the core of the future of cycling across Burlington, and frankly Halton should be consistent and mirror the routes that people want to travel. In my opinion the cost to benefit I take away from this report speaks volumes about the value of adding more cycling infrastructure that makes sense for where people want to go

Thank you for taking the time to review my report. I am happy to follow up in you have questions about the analysis, future planning, or cycling in general, please feel free to reach out anytime.